

Social Studies

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The Carlisle Indian School

by Amanda Turner



Genre	Build Background	Access Content	Extend Language
Nonfiction	• Native American Education • Lakota Sioux • Families	• Captions • Definitions • Historical Photographs • Maps	• Word Origins

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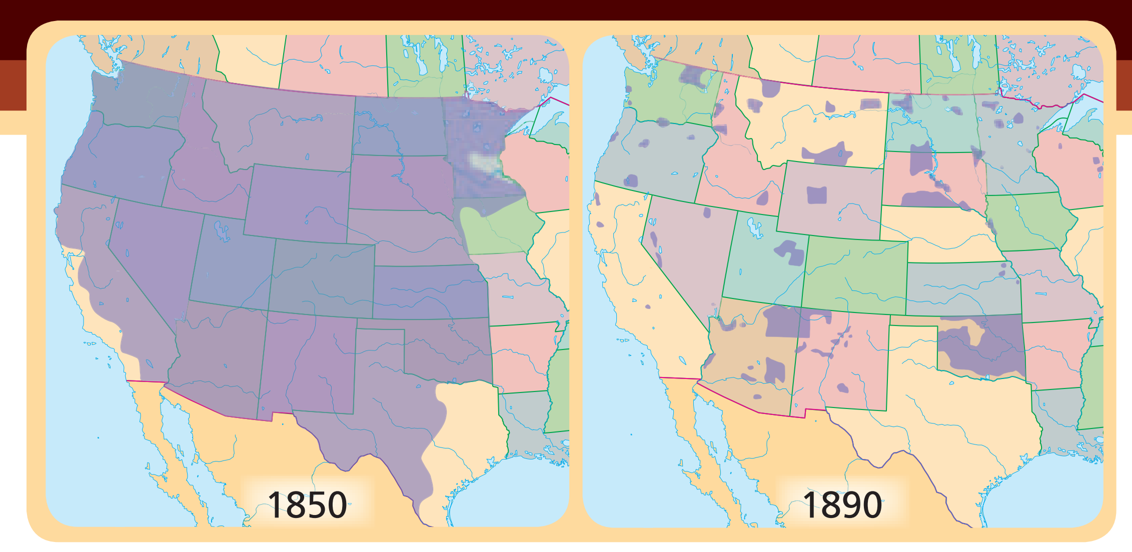
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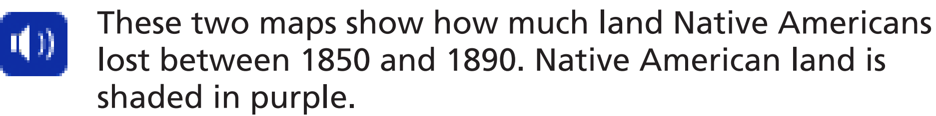
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These two maps show how much land Native Americans lost between 1850 and 1890. Native American land is shaded in purple.


From Land to Reservations

The western United States was home to Native Americans for thousands of years. In the mid-1800s, many European American settlers moved to the West, and Native Americans began to lose their land to the settlers. The United States army fought Native Americans. By 1890, Native Americans in the West had lost most of their land.

As Native Americans lost their land, they were moved to reservations. The government often forced Native American leaders to sign treaties that gave up their land. Some Native Americans also agreed to move to reservations.

forced: made someone do something by force

treaties: formal agreements




Captain Richard Pratt

Captain Pratt's Idea

The government used reservations as one way of controlling Native Americans. But some leaders in the United States government worried that Native Americans would still try to keep their land by fighting white settlers. They thought that the best way to make Native Americans stop fighting was to teach them to live like white people.

Captain Richard Pratt of the United States Army felt this way. He thought that Native American children should be sent to boarding schools to live away from home. At these schools, Native American children would learn to speak English and to dress and act like white people. The children would be kept away from their homes for a long time to change their attitudes.

attitudes: ways of thinking or feeling





Chief Spotted Tail visited Carlisle in 1880.

Captain Pratt's Idea Becomes Reality

In 1879, Captain Pratt received permission from the government to turn an old army post into a boarding school. The army post was in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The school would be called the Carlisle Indian Industrial School.

Now Captain Pratt needed students for his school. He visited the Lakota Sioux on their reservation in South Dakota.

Captain Pratt called the chiefs and warriors together. He told them that it would be good for their children to learn English. He told them about the school in Carlisle where they could learn to live like white people. The greatest chief Spotted Tail did not trust white men. He felt they had stolen the land from his people. He did not want the children to learn to lie and steal.





Native American children learned many things from their families at home.

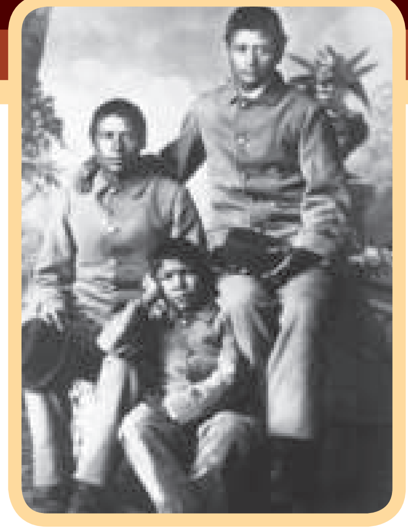
Captain Pratt told Spotted Tail that if he had known how to read, write, and speak English, he might have been able to save the lands for his people.

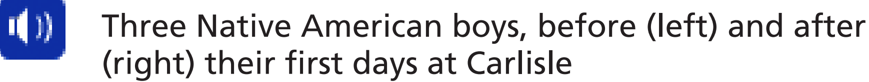
The chiefs sent Captain Pratt outside while they discussed his boarding school idea. No one wanted to send the children away. But they wanted a better life for their children. Finally the chiefs agreed to send the children away.

The Lakota Sioux children were among the first students at the Carlisle Indian School. Between 1879 and 1918, the school enrolled students from nearly every Native American tribe in the United States.









Three Native American boys, before (left) and after (right) their first days at Carlisle

First Days at School

The first days at Carlisle Indian School were painful for the children. They missed their families and homes very much. There were many difficult changes that the children had to make.

The children had to wear clothes and shoes that felt strange and uncomfortable. The boys suffered when their long hair was cut off. Since Native American men had long hair, the boys felt humiliated to have short hair.

Teachers also gave the children new names in English. Since the children did not know English, at first it was difficult for them to pronounce the names. The children also had to learn new customs for eating and other basic routines. Everything in their lives changed.

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painful: full of suffering, difficult

humiliated: ashamed

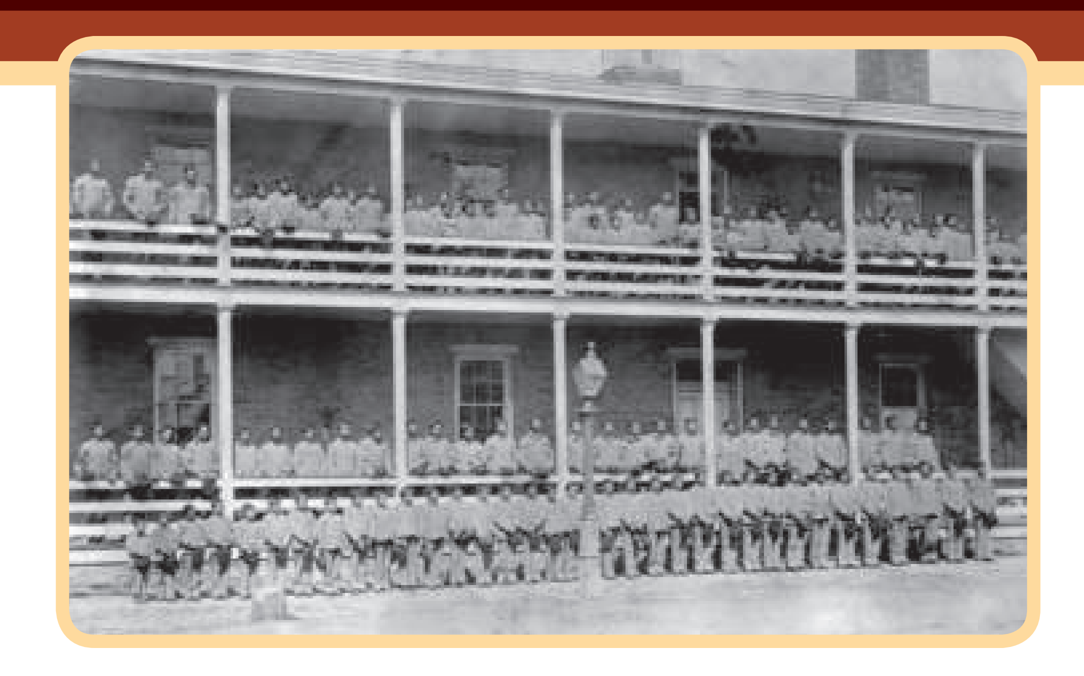


Girls working at the Carlisle School

Daily School Routines

The United States Army was in charge of the Carlisle School. Life for the children was very much like military life. The children slept in *dormitories*—large buildings with many rooms for sleeping. They dressed like soldiers. They marched to the dining room and to class.

The children did most of the hard work around the school. The girls washed and ironed clothes, scrubbed floors, cooked, and washed dishes. The boys worked outdoors, plowing, planting, harvesting crops, and taking care of the farm animals. They also learned to be carpenters and bricklayers. As the school grew, they built the new dormitories and classrooms.



Life at Carlisle was lonely and difficult. Many children never adjusted to the new customs. Some children died from illness and homesickness. Most children were not allowed to return to their homes for years.

Later in life, graduates of the Carlisle School had different feelings about their experiences. Some of them kept their English names, continued to wear clothes like the styles they wore at the school, and lived their lives away from the reservations. Others returned to their homelands and followed their traditional ways of life.

homesickness: missing their home and family



Talk About It

1. What did Captain Pratt tell Spotted Tail to get him to send the Sioux children to Carlisle?
2. *The Lakota Sioux children were among the first students at the Carlisle Indian School.* Is this a statement of fact or an opinion?

Write About It

3. Pretend you are a student at the Carlisle School in the year 1900. On a separate sheet of paper, write a letter home to your family.

Extend Language

People like Captain Pratt wanted Native Americans to forget their home languages. But English includes hundreds of words that come from Native American languages. For example, the word *raccoon* probably comes from the Algonquian word *arocoun.* Use dictionaries to find out about the origins of these words:

moose squash kayak

Photographs
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